



# Political Ridiculous: An Analysis about an Aesthetic-Political Mutation

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## Abstract

The expression Political Ridicule designates a mutation in political culture on a global scale. This paper works on the hypothesis that such mutation is taking place on an aesthetic level that is fundamental to the production of politics. The Tragical that has always been the ontological foundation of politics has been replaced by the Comical. It is, therefore, a matter of understanding the meaning of the comical character in politics. One hypothesis to be analysed is that the passage from democracy to fascism, as it can see in many countries, happened through the methodological use of “political ridicule” transformed into capital, especially in electoral processes marked by populism. The article proposes to introduce the concept of political ridiculousness through an analysis of ridicule as a psychopolitical form of control and social catharsis.

**Keywords:** Ridiculous; Aesthetic; Politics; Tragedy; Political culture

## The Political Ridicule Hypothesis

This work has a double purpose. First, to situate the concept of “political ridicule”<sup>1</sup> as a valid category of analysis for the understanding of contemporary politics. Second, it seeks to answer the question of the passage of contemporary democracies to fascism or, in more social terms, to the fascistization of societies in our recent political history. From an aesthetic-political approach, the hypothesis is that the “political ridicule” is the effective and procedural operator of the authoritarian turn that presents itself in a seductive way to the masses in this phase of world capitalism. The Political Ridicule (which as a category would imply the term “ridiculousness”) has become the calibrator of an aesthetic-political metabolism that accompanies an economic-

ideological project. The dizzying rise of far-right populism of the last decade reveals itself in this process not only as a cunning user of this aesthetic dimension marked by the performative and theatrical dimension, but as the thing itself.

The term “Political Ridicule” is defined at the intersection between the fields of aesthetics and politics. Through it is exposed the avatars of the aesthetic-political phenomenon that took over Europe a hundred years earlier, namely, the fascism. The question of political ridicule can reach the dawn of the history of power, as well as having a vast geopolitical scope. Indeed, today, it shapes a possible real mutation in political culture. The mutation in question is woven into history and is observable in the decisive and original irruption of the aesthetic as a fundamental level of political experience. In the search for truth that characterises philosophical endeavours, one must take into account that aesthetics cannot be separated from politics, just as politics

1 The concept of “Political Ridicule” was presented in a book of the same name published in 2017 by Ed. Record. In this article, I present aspects raised in the continuation of the research on the subject.

cannot be separated from aesthetics. In this sense, we will seek to show how the political mutation at stake is itself an aesthetic mutation that not only disrupts but establishes another quality of politics.

It can also be said that the aesthetic plan, as the plastic character of politics, is shaped according to the needs of the powers at stake - considering the political game in its competitive, mimetic and theatrical dimension - and stands out more or less according to historical situations and conditions. What is called anti-politics today is precisely politics that hides itself as such and reappears as a farce, but only for those who are in cognitive-affective conditions of perceiving the farce. Many enter the game without realizing that this is precisely because their perception has been affected.

The “non-political” is one of the main rhetorical tropes of the “anti-political” discourse in neoliberal times. Political characters who define themselves as non-political certainly operate as cynics within the scope of the discourse in vogue. It is a cunning used by candidates in campaign times who profit politically from the operation of generic destruction of politics operated by neoliberalism. The question of the difference between ‘the political’ (the general context of the human condition, of the linguistic and intersubjective action of generic human beings) and ‘the politics’ (of bureaucratized institutions) will soon be developed. However, it is essential to propose a reflection about the paradoxical position involving a person occupying a political position and self-declaring as non-political reflects above all a power effect at the time of the value (or anti-value) of political ridicule. What emerges as hatred of politics comes from a debasement of politics operated at its very core. The fetishistic suppression of the political is one of the common tactics in the context of the abandonment of the scruples that characterise the morality of candidates and the masses involved in political games. Cynicism is the rule of this discursivity that denies the place where it is self-realised. Certainly, the character who embodies this paradox of being political while denying politics, is all the more grotesque the more he tries to use the effect of power. At the same time, the more one denies the use of power and politics, the more victorious he or she becomes.

In the age of manipulated perception, it becomes impossible for the majority of the population to understand the game being played, in other words, to perceive the performance in which they participate. As in the classic tale of H. C. Andersen in which the subjects cannot see the nakedness of the king<sup>2</sup>, we are faced with a serious problem

of discernment which is equally of perception. The image of the tale confronts us with the question of the aesthetic-political plane. What is suppressed in what Edward Grüner defined as a “fetishistic suppression of the politician by the operations of politics”<sup>3</sup> is precisely the image of the nakedness of the king. In other words, it prevents the truth and its tragic burden from being perceived. The impression of prestidigitation in contemporary politics comes from the production of illusions. This is the very strategy of politics in the context of capitalism. The politician, the tragic instance as we shall see below, disappears through the operations of politics as a bureaucratic instance.

Attention must now be paid to the structure of the suppression related to the policy transformed into an operation of hiding the politician. Power needs to hide the nakedness of the king because its maintenance depends on this hiding. However, not only is the king naked, the clothing does not exist, and one must ask how it disappeared, because it is not an object that has never existed.

In the context of the present argument, this means that the ritual instance proper to the political in the time of the Tragic, gives way to a mere simulation in the time of the Comic. The common - the costume that we must all see or whose absence we must all perceive - that arises from ritual, which in turn designates what is done together to celebrate something, is emptied out. Fantasy is commonplace and even delirium. What in KOJÈVE (1946) appears as “animalization of man”, “snobbery” as a ritual empty of content, as pure formalization of human life, may be a key to understanding what is happening. What we understand by comedy, about which much less theory has been made than about tragedy until today, is the political place of Kojève’s post-historical epoch, in which the human being would enter into an animal becoming. Now, since Aristotle, comedy would have a link with animality, with the universe of subterranean beings that inhabit topologically low levels, as opposed to the tragic, linked in turn to transcendence, to the world of the gods and, therefore, to death.

In this sense, the mutation that this article deals with concerns the elevation of the comic as a new level and even a new political paradigm in which the politician is himself denied, while the tragic and the historical in the Kojève’s sense. Therefore, there is no utopia in this, as there seems to be in Kojève when he gives his impressions about the empty rituals of the Japanese aristocracy and the American

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child who sees the king naked is a metaphor of conscience that does not submit to vanity and the pride of power.

3 Grüner E (2002) *La Tragedia, o El fundamento perdido de lo político*. CLACSO, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales : Buenos Aires. P. 34.

2 “The Emperor’s New Clothes” was published in 1837 by Hans Cristian Andersen and is inspired by short stories. In this case, the perception of a

Way of Life. Nature itself, in which animalisation could mean reconciliation, is denied in the epoch of farce. Instead of the truth or the search for the nexus between politics and truth, the human being has to be content with the experience of the simulacrum in the order of the political where he comes to be human. It is not surprising that the speeches in the tone of “post-truth”, the Fake News, the disinformation, are part of a linguistic program produced as a new way of doing politics. Post-truth could only emerge in the post-history and represents a new metabolism of the linguistic economy.

With such an approach, the image of politics under the conditions of capitalism is certainly at stake, but above all is that image in the context of general political performativity, in which the effects sought by capitalism serve the self-reproduction of power<sup>4</sup>. The ritual and/or symbolic operation insists on all power is what we are calling here its performativity, and it is empty. It implies now to pretend that the power itself is not on the scene, that the violence that is practiced in the name of power is not violence. The fetishistic suppression of the politician is also suppression of truth. At the same time, an immediate link is simulated between the people and the sovereign or political character in the electoral phase through this hidden void.

The void is also from democracy which reappears as a kind of “lost cause”<sup>5</sup>. It plays no other role than to serve as a faded show of an empty ritual. It also becomes the empty signifier<sup>6</sup> used even by the extreme right. In this sense, one can say that democracy becomes something of a spectral. It is erased at the moment it is used as a reproduction and immediate self-realization of power or of what, in Adorno, is reality itself as ideology and which refers to the theme of transparency present in the allegory of the king’s new clothes<sup>7</sup>. It is the smoke screen, the king’s new clothing that cannot be seen as absent precisely because it does not

exist, and must therefore be accepted as a collective fantasy with absolute truth value. This is the aesthetic dimension of populism, the agreement of all around a lie, which is confused with its social dimension.

In this sense, the aesthetic dimension is not a force or a quality of power. It is the power itself as an empty signifier exposed in the non-existent clothes of the king. It can be said that the less aesthetic in the sense of seeking effects is the character of power, the less authoritarian it will be. And, in this sense, it is not surprising that capitalism is an aesthetic dictatorship that seeks at all costs to hide its authoritarian character through the seduction and adulation of the masses. Such is the scenario in which the game of political ridicule develops.

Foucault mentioned the ridiculous as a characteristic of certain characters linked to the dimension of the “grotesque”<sup>8</sup>, itself part of the mechanics of power. In *Les Anormaux* he states that one could already perceive in characters like Nero and Heliogabalus the functioning of the catalogue “ubuesque”, an expression used from the play *Ubu Roi* by Alfred Jarry<sup>9</sup> staged at the end of the 19th century in France. Foucault insists that it is necessary to treat the grotesque as a category of analysis and not as mere insult. His intention is to understand the “grotesque discourse”, at the same time “statutory and disqualified” exercised by judges and doctors in the context of producing a “power effect”. Foucault raises the question of the “infamous sovereign,” a character as a whole “infamous, grotesque, ridiculous,” and of the “grotesque sovereignty” defined by the “maximization of the effects of power from the disqualification of the one who produces it”<sup>10</sup>.

In view of Foucault’s statement that the theory of the

4 The concept of performativity used in this work is the classic concept of the language theory of the English thinker J. L. Austin, for whom speaking is doing. See: *How to do things with words*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Harvard Press, 1976.

5 Democracy in this “substantial”, “ontological” sense, is the impossible object of politics: it is the political that has become a “lost cause” of politics. Grüner, 2002. P. 22

6 Laclau E, Mouffe C (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. Verso: London.

7 “Contemporary ideology is the state of awareness and non-awareness of the masses as an objective spirit, not the petty products that imitate that state and repeat it, for the worse, in order to ensure its reproduction. Ideology, strictly speaking, takes place where power relations that are not intrinsically transparent, mediated and, in this sense, even attenuated, are governed. However, for all this, today’s society, wrongly accused of excessive complexity, has become too transparent. This transparency is precisely what is most reluctantly admitted. The less there is of ideology and the cruder the products that succeed it...”. Adorno and Horkheimer. *Ideologia, em Temas Básicos de Sociologia*. São Paulo, ed. Cultrix, 1973.

8 Foucault discusses the relationship between truth and justice, and states that precisely where the intersection of these discourses takes place, those true discourses arise, with “desirable judicial effects” and which have the curious property of being foreign to all rules, even the most elementary of a scientific discourse, to the rules of law and which are “grotesque”. According to *Les Anormaux*. Cours au Collège de France, 1974-1975. EHESS, Gallimard, Seuil, 1999. P. 12 and «La vérité et les formes juridiques» (1974), in *Dits et Écrits*, I, p. 1406-1514. See also : CASARA, Rubens R R. *Sociedade Sem Lei. Pós-democracia, personalidade autoritária, idiotice e barbaridade*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2018.

9 Jarry, *Ubu Roi*. *Édition du Mercure de France*, 1896. Digital version at [http://alfredjarry.fr/oeuvresnumerisees/PDFJarry/Jarry\\_BM\\_Laval\\_90644.pdf](http://alfredjarry.fr/oeuvresnumerisees/PDFJarry/Jarry_BM_Laval_90644.pdf)

10 “By explicitly portraying power as abject, infamous, ubuesque or simply ridiculous, it is not, I believe, a matter of limiting its effects and magically deconstructing the one to whom the crown is given. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is a question of vividly manifesting the inevitability, the inevitability of power, which can function precisely in all its rigour and at the extreme point of its violent rationality, even when it is in the hands of someone who is effectively disqualified”, p. 12.

“infamy of the sovereign”<sup>11</sup> has never been made, the time has come to invest less in this possibility than in the problem raised by the issue. Is it possible to tell the story of the vile sovereigns, the story of political actors shameful for their violence, stupidity, idiocy when what is defined as “power” is perhaps no more than the form of violence that hides their grotesque and is used in this process of aesthetic tricks, both discursive and imaginative? Although Foucault has not taken up the theory of the infamous sovereign, its illuminating potential cannot be overlooked, especially at a time when examples of the grotesque characters and discourses proliferate on the political scene around the world. The text that follows seeks to be an understanding of the general scenario, of the political style to which populations are aesthetically and politically submitted and, often, in full joy of this condition.

In this text, the choice to develop the theme of ridicule, whose specificity must be analysed beyond the grotesque,<sup>12</sup> is due to the hypothesis that it is laughter that is at the heart of the aesthetic operation of authoritarian power in its current phase. An analysis of the grotesque would imply other research and other scopes. Analysing laughter as a central aspect of the aesthetic-political dimension should help us to understand the movement through which a certain image of politics in force in the imaginary of society has undergone blunt transformations.

The concept of Political Ridicule refers to a scenario, an environment or public atmosphere. Characters who present themselves as caricatures, and without any shame of being so, within a communication industry soiled by lies and Fake News, represent a kind of new political capital that has been widely produced and consumed in the time of politics reduced to advertising as was already the case in the period of German Nazism. The downgrading of politics to advertising has produced a kind of image, that of politics as merchandise. The image of professional politics as represented by parliamentarians is of something without ethical and moral value. This image combines moralism, religiosity, and the rhetoric of hatred, which, little by little and according to need, makes a transition to the open fascist discourse. The grotesque discourses of which Foucault speaks, lead to destruction and death in authoritarian regimes, however, at first, the populations affected by such discourses do not take seriously, or take little seriously, what the bearers of

hate speech say, precisely because they do not understand its content or, by understanding it, think they are pure flatus vocis. Such political characters are seen as exaggerated, caricatured, in a word, grotesque and/or ridiculous, but at the same time entertaining. They become deserving of votes and electoral victories for various reasons, such as revenge and resentment of voters against left-wing politicians<sup>13</sup>.

By political ridicule we can therefore define both the particular performance of an individual and the performativity itself, a kind of method to which anyone - group, movement, party - can adhere. Advertising quality is the guarantee of immediate political profit in the form of votes. Personal performativity takes place in a scene, a built atmosphere, a kind of atmosphere within a stage in which the actor need only be “spontaneous” and “cathartic,” in which stupidity, rudeness, stupidity serve as an impulse for the verbal text to be delivered. On this stage, which has the dimension of a “whole” in the collective perception, a true “Gestalt” of political characters is established. The perception of the political form as something unpleasant that may arise for some spectators does not exclude the ecstasy generated on a scenic level for masses by such characters. There are, in Brazil and in the world, cases of people who could have become victims of ridiculous scenes in which they participated, but who, in fact, form “awarded” by them electing themselves as the most voted candidates<sup>14</sup>.

Political ridicule has become an aesthetic-political capital. It concerns the return of something archaic, of an image

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13 Pinheiro-Machado, R, Scalco LM (2020) From hope to hate: The rise of conservative subjectivity in Brazil,” HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory. V. 10.n. 1. <https://doi.org/10.1086/708627> . See also Solano E (2019), La bolsonarización de Brasil. IELAT Working Documents, Versión Digital, ISSN: 1989-8819, N° 121, April 2019. In Instituto Universitario de Investigación en Estudios Latinoamericanos - Universidad de Alcalá.

14 There are several cases, but we can highlight some that deserve analysis: Tiririca, Janafna Pascoal, Alexandre Frota, Kim Kataguirí who rose to power from what Foucault called grotesques. Unfortunately, the specifics of each of these characters cannot be analysed in the context of this article. I refer, however, to the older congressmen than those cited during the famous scene in the Brazilian national congress at the time of Dilma Rousseff’s impeachment vote in 2016 that shocked the population. The deputies who were there were re-elected in 2018. One of them, who gave the following speech, the most grotesque of all, became president of Brazil: “On this day of glory for the Brazilian people has a name that will go down in history on that date, for the way he conducted his homework. Congratulations, President Eduardo Cunha. They lost in 64, they lost now in 2016. For the family and the innocence of the children in the classroom that the PT never had, against communism, for our freedom, against the forum of São Paulo, for the memory of Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, for the fear of Dilma Rousseff, for the army of Caxias, for our armed forces, for a Brazil above all and for God above all, my vote is yes”. Bolsonaro was known for never having had a law passed, among which were the chemical castration of rapist’s project. Today, Bolsonaro’s government follows the line of his campaign that has grown and appeared ever since.

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11 “This problem of the infamy of sovereignty, this problem of the disqualified sovereign, after all, is Shakespeare’s problem; and the whole series of tragedies of kings poses precisely this problem, without ever, it seems to me, making the infamy of the sovereign the theory, p. 23.

12 Francis Barasch: *The Grotesque, a study of Meanings*. The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1971.

that survives in time to compose, under new technological conditions, an environment in which politics gives space to a specific simulation of barbarity. It is politics as the theatre of the grotesque by the ridiculous. We can speak of an inversion of ethical or moral levels, but it is a question of evaluating something earlier, related to what, in the words of Adorno and Horkheimer is fascism, when “what was hidden appears in the light of day”, at the moment when “history also reveals itself in its connection with this nocturnal side and ignored both in the official legend of the national states and in its progressive criticism”.

This phenomenon becomes even more complex in the context of a society of spectacle or an excited society. Voters, individuals who could potentially exercise critical citizenship, have been reduced to spectators - or viewers<sup>15</sup> - have been reduced to robots of politics, itself transformed into pure spectacle. This means that the relationship that citizens have with politics today is mediated by technological aesthetic practices that change the quality of the old perceptions and rituals that defined the experience with politics.

Before proceeding with this analysis, it is necessary, however, to understand the conceptual, epistemological and historical framework of the relationship between aesthetics and politics.

### The Intersectional Dimension between Aesthetics and Politics

Understanding the centrality of aesthetics in what concerns political analysis, rescuing the historical relationship between aesthetics and politics, the relationship of “foundation” of one field in relation to the other as we see currently proposed in thinkers like Jacques Rancière (2000) and Eduardo Grüner (2002)<sup>16</sup>, will help to deepen aspects related to reflection on the Political Ridicule.

Up to now the concepts of “political” and “politics”, of “aesthetical” and “aesthetics” have appeared in a little different way. From now on, definitions have been established that will allow parallels between the political and the politics, the aesthetical and the aesthetics, the tragedy and

the comedy, and thus understand the idea of a mutation in political culture implies in the concept of Political Ridicule.

First of all, we must define the “political” as the concrete territory in which the different spheres of human life are articulated: the ethical, the moral, the economic, the religious, the individual, the world of life, the private, the public, the psychic, the social, the ideological, the religious, the symbolic and the imaginary. We must include in it the articulators of the “disagreement”<sup>17</sup> and the “agonistic”<sup>18</sup>. The “political” concerns the whole of human actions that adhere to or confront order, that order itself being an effect of relations. The “politician” will be the experience of the social in which ritual and foundation of the state are articulated, as we see in Grüner<sup>19</sup> for whom the three elements (State, Ritual, Society) are a single foundational action. In Grüner, we find that the modern bourgeois state can only articulate itself on the basis precisely of the negation of the ‘political’, which is equivalent to the negation of the Tragic.

Grüner’s approach allows us to think of the moment before the advent of ridicule and to anticipate the problem of the relationship between aesthetics and politics in ontological terms beyond historical-chronological time. For Grüner, “this founding conflict of the political between the Chaos of unbound jouissance and the Order of the rule that is articulated in the ritual of sacrifice, already has its “theory”: it is called Tragedy.”<sup>20</sup>

In this sense, in seeking a definition of aesthetics, we cannot say that it is one more part of politics, because, much earlier, it is its foundation. Tragedy is not only a theatrical genre in the sense that theatre assumes in the contemporary world. Tragedy is the political-aesthetic-social ritual that defines a certain relationship of the individual with the whole. Tragic is, in turn, the constitutive element of the political and that is absent in politics as the institutionalization of the emptied ritual, as pure and simple power that maintains itself. As an artistic form, tragedy is a ritual that establishes social cohesion and that tragic poets have articulated as a work of art<sup>21</sup>. It is not by chance that it appears in the same

17 Rancière J (1995) *La mésentente : politique et philosophie*. Collection La philosophie en effet. Galilée: Paris.

18 Mouffe C (2013) *Agonistics. Thinking the world Politically*. London/ New York: Verso.

19 Grüner E (2002) *La Tragedia, o El fundamento perdido de lo político*. CLACSO, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales : Buenos Aires. Grüner E (2006). *O Estado: paixão de multidões. Espinosa versus Hobbes, entre Hamlet e Édipo*. CLACSO/DGP-FFLCH-USP: Buenos Aires e São Paulo.

20 “... este conflicto fundante de lo político entre el Caos del goce sin ataduras y el Orden de la regla que se articula en el ritual de sacrificio, tiene ya su “teoría”: se llama Tragedia”. P. 20.

21 We cannot fail to mention, although it escapes the purpose of this text,

15 I made an effort to lay the foundations for a theory of television in a book that was published in 2011 entitled “Glass Eye: Television and the state of exception of the image” (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2011) in which I try to show how television is the universe of screens to which we are submitted and how they function as a mechanism of desubjectivation.

16 For the Argentine philosopher, the political is separated from politics. The “political” is “Understood as an instance, that is, as a space of a practical ontology of the whole of the citizens as it can still be found in the Aristotelian notion of the *zoon politikón*”, while “politics” is understood as “the exercise of a specific “profession” within the institutional limits defined by the “static” space of the legal State” (2002, p. 21).

century as democracy and that Nietzsche comes to say that philosophy - which also becomes an institution with Socrates at that time - will be the dissolution of tragedy<sup>22</sup>.

Now, it can be said that the aesthetic would be the backdrop of the politics if it were not entwined with it. An unconscious framework for the vast majority of populations, the aesthetic is the universe of perception in which the world of relationships is established, which is defined as proper to the plane of the politician.

Aesthetical is therefore a disposition, an ontological plateau, not only a quality of things as we see in "aesthetic". Nor would aesthetics as a field be merely an area or discipline of the philosophical field. It is not only a theory of "appearing" or of art or of "beautiful art". The distinction between aesthetical and aesthetic is as important as the distinction between "the political" and "the politics". Likewise, aesthetics can be thought as a philosophy of the body, itself a category that cannot be understood outside relationships and thus outside the power relations inherent at politics. The body is therefore one of the aesthetic-political themes par excellence. The control over the bodies<sup>23</sup> is undoubtedly a typically aesthetic-political problem.

In any case, philosophical aesthetics, or aesthetic theory, is the space of theoretical elaboration on the vast field that we are calling "aesthetical", in comparison with the

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that Grüner begins his text by analysing a funeral ritual of a Balinese king commented on by Clifford Geertz in which the king's young wives throw themselves, no doubt as to what they do, into the pyre in which the royal husband is cremated. This sacrifice reminds us of Nicole Loraux's text on the killing of women in the Greek tragedy, which confronts us with the problem of the place occupied by women in the tragedy and, consequently, in politics (1985). The aesthetic pleasure at stake in the tragedy is not separated from the sense of politics and politics as structurally patriarchal and defined on a tragic foundation in which women have a unique role, that of sacrifice. In that sense, see the following articles: TIBURI, Marcia. Ofélia morta - from speech to image. *Revista Estudos Feministas*, Florianópolis, v. 18, n. 2, p. 301, Jan. 2010. ISSN 1806-9584. Available at: < <https://periodicos.ufsc.br/index.php/ref/article/view/S0104-026X2010000200002>>. Access on: 01 May 2022. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-026X2010000200002>. Tiburi, M. (2013). Gradiva Espectral. *Sapere Aude*, 3(6), 421-454. In <http://periodicos.pucminas.br/index.php/SapereAude/article/view/4662> and TIBURI, Marcia. Diadorim: biopolitics and gender in the metaphysics of the Sertão. *Revista Estudos Feministas*, Florianópolis, v. 21, n. 1, p. 191-207, May 2013. ISSN 1806-9584. Available at: < <https://periodicos.ufsc.br/index.php/ref/article/view/S0104-026X2013000100010>>. Access on: 01 May 2022. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-026X2013000100010>

22 Nietzsche FW (1992) O nascimento da tragédia ou helenismo e pessimismo. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

23 In the Dialectics of Enlightenment, the authors already spoke of a control over the body "Kontrolle über den Körper" (See the paragraph entitled "Interest am Körper" in the Notes and Sketches (Aufzeichnungen und Entwürfe). See also the notion of "love-hate" (Haßliebe) linked to the opposition between two places of the body, the living body and the body as a thing, the opposition Leib-Körper.

political plane, in the condition of experience or object of investigation. In fact, aesthetics is an organ of power. It is the appearance of politics. Art is an aesthetic question, just as advertising is an aesthetic question. And we can say that art is to tragedy as the paradigm of the political, just as publicity is to comedy as the new paradigm of the political. This means that politics is under the sign of its own dissolution, to which politics collaborates as an instance of power emptied of any other meaning than that of sustaining and reproducing itself.

Aesthetics as a sphere of human experience linked to perception and the body, carries with it a "promise of culture", i.e. the promise of a better world. This is an ethical and political promise. However, what kind of promise does aesthetics hold under the conditions of the cultural industry in its action on sensibility and the body? In the cultural industry, would aesthetics be reduced to a machine of the destruction of aesthetics itself? Would the cultural industry be to aesthetics what anti-politics is to politics?

Aesthetic autonomy in the face of morality, political impositions and capital as the great game of power and, in this sense, the game of language, was part of the promise of art. From poetry to painting, from literature to cinema, the works carry throughout history the promise of this autonomy and of a better world. The discussion around the mimesis in Plato and Aristotle, through which the reflection on what we understand by fiction today is inaugurated, was constituted by the possibility of improving in art that which was difficult to understand in reality or in the scope of life. Now, the link between aesthetics and politics is also verified at the moment when idealizations and utopian positions constitute both the history of political thought and the history of thought and activity in art. However, in the context of ongoing political mutation, this promise has been changed.

What artists like Sigmar Polke<sup>24</sup> called "capitalist realism", what Mark Fischer<sup>25</sup> defined as the celebration of the destruction of public space, is the image of this new world in which aesthetics as well as politics play a different role. The "aesthetics of deregulation"<sup>26</sup> of the market promises something different than community ideas and utopias, promises farcical and caricatured utopias against

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24 Capitalist realism is a movement created by Gerhard Richter, Manfred Kuttner and Konrad Lueg in Berlin in the 1960s as opposed to "socialist realism" as a reaction to American pop art.

25 Fisher M (2009) Capitalist Realism. Zero Books. Is there no alternative? "The widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it. Once, dystopian films and novels were exercises in such acts of imagination - the disasters they depicted acting as narrative pretext for the emergence of different ways of living."

26 Türcke C (2002) Erregte Gesellschaft : Philosophie der Sensation. München: Beck.

which art offers irony and dystopia. If a certain aesthetic remains promising civilization against its own malaise, there is another that integrates and reproduces the state of things on stage, which confirms that there is an aesthetic struggle, itself a political struggle.

What erupts in the realm of aesthetics now, is the aesthetic machine with a new promise that, well analysed, is actually seen as a threat. That of the anti-intellectual, anti-art, anti-autonomy, anti-reflection cultural war, in which, for example, right-wing extremism acts against criticism in a hallucinated way<sup>27</sup>, religious conservatism against gender, neoliberalism against all values that had been consecrated as human rights.

### The Slide from Tragedy to Farce

With Marx's statement in the 18th Brumaire<sup>28</sup> that history once presents itself as tragedy and then repeats itself as farce, the terrain of political ridicule is once again presented. Such a position, read by many as mere spiritedness, refers to a tragic model concerning politics that would have been adulterated. In Grüner we find the theme of the recurrent "deslizamiento de la tragedia a la farsa", but the author does not make it clear how the slide operation takes place. The track is in the Marxian model: the characters of the present would be caricatured imitations of heroes from the past. The operation is aesthetic, the imitation, or mimesis that, since the controversy between Plato's and Aristotle's positions, implies the falsification, in the first, while, in the second implies fiction<sup>29</sup>. In Plato, mimesis does not refer only to works of art, but to all beings, including discourses and institutions<sup>30</sup>. Plato will be a critic of the mimetic procedure, that imitative artifice by which ideas that inhabit a world beyond the sensitive are as if soiled in the form of simulations, a problem not found in Aristotle. Plato's concern is with the formative experience, with education, while Aristotle would have been more condescending with the dimension of entertainment proper to the imitative arts. For the purposes of this argument, it is important to know

that mimesis is a concept that implies a method, a movement between ideas and reality, analogous to the sense of Eros in the field of knowledge as we see in the Banquet.

Aby Warburg's perspective<sup>31</sup> helps to understand this idea of a slide between tragedy and farce through which the intimacy between aesthetics and politics becomes clear. Grüner perceives this intimacy in the work of Aby Warburg<sup>32</sup>, a researcher who has become important to the world of art history, but whose political dimension is not rarely observed. Grüner perceives in the "duality of culture" between terror and beauty, between chaos and harmony, the relationship between tragedy and politics. The notion of sinister duality is related to Freud's notion of Unheimliche<sup>33</sup>. It is possible to expand this notion to understand the relationship between tragedy and comedy, as usual aesthetic pair. As with tragedy, comedy is not only a style, or a form, in the sense of a literary or theatrical genre, but above all, a certain way of articulating politics.

In this sense, the operation of slippage does not imply the end of the political ritual, but the appearance of another ritual, in which it is no longer the life of the gods and transcendence that is at stake, but the animality of the human being. If tragedy makes us laugh, comedy makes laughter imperative. On another level of comparison, it can be said that instead of the beautiful and sublime, which comes to constitute the field of tragedy, it is disgust, the sinister and the sense of dystopia, which comes to constitute the field of comedy. The tension between the conscious and the unconscious at play in the universe of the comical puts the "sinister duality"<sup>34</sup> back on the scene in an eternal repetition of the introjected sliding and transformed into mental operation. The procedures of culture, are subjective procedures. Comedy implies the carnival ritual in which the usual senses are inverted, but they can be lived subjectively and individually. There is in comedy, a formal destruction of the previously established law that, in tragedy was tensioned

27 Adorno TW (2019) Aspekte des neuen Rechts-radikalismus. Suhrkamp: Berlin.

28 Marx K (2011) O 18 Brumário de Luís Bonaparte. Boitempo: São Paulo. "Hegel observes in one of his works that all the facts and characters of great importance in the history of the world occur, so to speak, twice. And he forgot to add: the first as tragedy and the second as farce." p. 6

29 The concept of mimesis runs through the history of philosophical aesthetics, art and literature being one of its most polyphonic terms. See Gebauer, Gunter; Wulf, Christoph. Mimesis, Culture, Art, Society. Translated by D. Reneau. Berkeley: University of California Press.

30 Leszl WG (2006) Plato's attitude to poetry and the fine arts, and the origins of aesthetics. pp. 245-336; Chevrolet T (2008). Aristóteles posto à prova de Platão ou o caso mimesis: A Poética entre alguns teóricos do fim do s. XVI. *Aisthe* 2:3655.

31 Warburg A (2017) Histórias de fantasma para gente grande. Trad. Lenin Barbara. São Paulo: Cia das Letras; Warburg A (2003) Le rituel du serpent - art & anthropologie. Paris: Ed. Macula; Michaud PA (2012) Aby Warburg et l'image en mouvement. Paris: Macula.

32 "Operation Warburg is therefore, in a broad but narrow sense of the word, *political*. I mean: an appeal to the *polis*, "city" made also, and perhaps mainly, of representations of faces and bodies, and which would like to avoid having to deal with its own monstrosities, the quota of *barbarism* that is inscribed in its "civilization", according to the famous dictum of Walter Benjamin. (Grüner, 2017, p. 9)

33 Freud S (2012) *Das Unheimliche*. Europäischer Literatur Verlag.

34 Creating his theory of wit, Freud deals with the question of the relationship between the conscious and the unconscious in action in this type of humour production. See D'Angeli C, Paduano G (2001) *Lo cómico*. Coleção Léxico Estético. Madri: La balsa de la Medusa, p. 243. See also Freud S (1996) Os Chistes e sua relação com o inconsciente. Trad. Margaret Solomon. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 1996.

and problematized, but still respected. The sinister duality implies a movement of dialectic bascule. Comedy becomes tragedy in fascism, tragedy becomes comedy.

It is with Warburg that the possibility of a history of images arises from the hypothesis that there is a survival of images in historical time, that images return in time. The term used by Warburg is "nachleben". Eduardo Grüner<sup>35</sup> saw in the Warburg "nachleben" the idea of a "zombie survival" that in everything combines with the political moment of nations dominated by fascist tyrants. The slide from tragedy to farce would then be related to deterioration, to the process of death. Would it be the Freudian instinct of death or the repression (Verdrängung), would it be the Nietzschean decadence, or would it be much more a process by which the sublimation that should have happened in tragedy as a work of art, becomes phantasmagoria in comedy as Fake News.

The slide to which Grüner refers implies politics (the bureaucracy) destroying politics (the universe of the zoon logikon as zoon politikon). In the same way, aesthetics would be destroying aesthetical, as well as Comic would be shattering the Tragic. The formula by which the cultural industry is for the non-aesthetical, like non-politics for the political, has value in this process. It is politics itself that returns emptied of its operation and appears with the farce, as pure form, as pure emulation without content, as "power without qualification", as the subject of Ubu Roi and not only of Macbeth (being one the continuity of the other), at the moment when politics imitates itself, simulates itself and the world seems duplicated and, in catastrophic moments, even inverted. The passage from tragedy to farce is a constant, a bascule where the intersection between aesthetics and politics constitutes its link. The current sensation of the sinister Freudian in political experience, the tragedy and the farce in Marxist sense, the zombie survival incarnated by the political characters of our time, does not allow us to forget the paralyzing stupor of the indigenous peoples in front of the Spanish gold eaters of which Silvia Cusicanqui speaks<sup>36</sup>. Such examples are part of the same aesthetic-political experience of the peoples that never ceases to repeat itself.

35 According to Grüner: "The "survival" that disharmonizes the appearance, we said recently, is not a mere cultural lag: it is a ghost, or is the vampire figure of the *dead-living*, of the *Un-dead*, of the *Non-sferatu* whose shadow lurks within the *heimlich*, the "familiar", comfortable and welcoming, of the home of aestheticized beauty. In Grüner E (2017) *Iconografías Malditas, Imágenes Descantadas: Hacia una Política « warburguiana »* en la Antropología del Arte.

36 The feeling that the world is reversed, however, is not new in terms of politics. It had already hit the Amerindian peoples a long time ago. Now it can become a category of political analysis also for all cultures threatened at this stage of our history. See: Cusicanqui, Silvia Rivera. *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: una reflexión sobre las prácticas y los discursos descolonizadores*. Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2010.

Another clue allows us to think of political ridicule as a path from tragedy to farce. What Deleuze calls the "order of the surface"<sup>37</sup> allows us to think of two spaces separated by a fissure. The order of the surface is where the fissure is established by disturbing this order. The fissure is the hole, the cleft through which leached subjectivity escapes by the process of desubjectivation proper to capitalism. If we simply invert the ribbon, on one side the tragedy, on the other the comedy, we find another order of surface, but this does not eliminate the rift. According to Deleuze, the "real difference is not between the inside and the outside. The fissure is neither inner nor outer, it is on the border, insensitive, embodied, ideal." The fissure produces "the exterior and interior complex interference and crossover relationships. Its effect is a "jumping junction". Deleuze's complex commentary on Fitzgerald allows one to think of the "crack-up" as an external and internal event. Deleuze is a reflection on the logic of meaning, but we can support the theme of sliding in this process in which two universes come together precisely because of the abyss between them. However, Deleuze's interest in subjectivity allows us to understand how the operation of fascistization of subjectivity takes place. How is the subjective adherence to fascism achieved through a process in which the interior and the exterior are connected in shock, or in which in Fitzgerald is the blow that comes from within.

Subjectivity here has the sense of shared experience. Emptiness is shared (and we can refer here to the emptying of thought). What erupts from the fissure is a shared psychic material, a psychic energy, in which the ridiculous is another political aesthetical "pathosformel", as in Warburg. Political ridicule is a plasticity, an imagetic material, which implies the construction of a scene. That is, of a theatricality to compose the public sphere and which is experienced collectively. The masses participate in this theatricality, adulated and manipulated in a founding ritual of the state, no longer based on the parameter of tragedy, but now of comedy.

The idea of a fissure concerns the ecstasy of the masses in the direction of the authoritarian leader who enchants precisely through his pathetic performance which, emulating joke, promises catharsis. In this sense, the "führer" is the substance, he has the role of god,<sup>38</sup> who is the object of all fixation and addiction, which concentrates the effect of ecstasy, the effect of addiction, the narcotic sensation, the fascination with horror when liberation is exercised through it. The slide from tragedy to farce would not happen without the catharsis of the masses promoted by such characters. The

37 Deleuze, G (1969) *Logique du Sens*. Éditions de Minuit : Paris.

38 "Myth" is the term by which fans of President Jair Bolsonaro refer to his idol.



fissure is where fascism puts the key of catharsis through which it is possible to swing a society from democracy to authoritarianism, that is, from tragedy to farce.

Enhanced by mass media and the advancement of the digital sphere, the ridiculous gives a popular image to power, an image whose function is to produce adulation for the production of identification with the leader and thus promote the link, the irreducible bond between leader and followers. The masses are pleased, not only by images with which they can feel contemplated narcissistically, but on a deeper level, physio-theologically as said Christoph Türcke, as we will see below.

### Laughter as a Catharsis in the Context of the Cultural Industry

In the popular imagination, politics is a concept increasingly associated with farce which is, technically speaking, a theatrical form of the order of comedy, but which also has a sense of bad quality, of deception. The general form of the farce assumed the whole of the political ritual and became the general image of politics. It is, therefore, in the current text to understand the operations linked to laughter - and to Comic as opposed to Tragic - that bring out the forms of infamous sovereignty (Foucault) which we must understand at the moment when it resurfaces under new conditions, presenting itself as the reproduction of chaos in the opposite direction of the cohesion necessary to sustain a society.

In the scenario of abstract praise for freedom of expression, which is itself the object of mysticism by communication techniques common to the extreme right field that reduces it to what we can define as neoliberalization of language, criticism of laughter easily succumbs to the fame of authoritarianism, such is the predominance of neoliberal ideology in all minds organizing a true neoliberal colonization of ideas. Considered a value in places like Brazil, where the image of the "country of the ready joke" prevails, laughter is a theme that needs critical reflection. Adorno and Horkheimer are authors who engage in a critical analysis of laughter. In the text on the Cultural Industry, we find that:

"In the false society, laughter has attacked - like an illness - happiness, dragging it into the unworthy totality of that society. To laugh at something (Lachen) is always to ridicule (Verlachen), and the life that, according to Bergson, breaks with laughter the consolidation of customs, is in fact the life that erupts barbarously, the self-assertion that dares to celebrate in a social occasion its liberation from scruple"<sup>39</sup>.

39 Adorno TW, Horkheimer M (1988) *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Fischer: Frankfurt am Main.

The authors point to the continuity between laughter and ridicule, the particular act or fact of laughter and the action that promotes it towards the other. This action takes away the simple naturalness or spontaneity of laughter and puts it in a political place, mediated by power relations. To take laughter beforehand as a virtue or an advantage is the danger that culture has become accustomed to running until this danger becomes natural. This is precisely the use of laughter in an authoritarian culture.

Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of laughter is part of an aesthetic critique, namely the critique of beauty as a kind of ideological form resulting from a "mechanical reproduction of beauty" as a "reactionary exaltation of culture". The authors speak of a "triumph over beauty" that is carried out by humour, as in a war in which the elevated, the tragic, the transcendent are attacked. The authors have a dialectical view of this game of forces, but do not consider laughter to be a victory. Nor is it the beauty upon which he would intend to triumph. Laughter is a false victory. It is in this sense that they state that "we laugh at the fact that there is nothing to laugh about"<sup>40</sup>. Laughter has become a way of cheating happiness, which would be an ethical parameter of culture. In this sense, we see in this process the method of debasement and reversal that is proper to comedy as an artistic structure.

Laughter and the action of ridicule are at the heart of the operation of fascistization of culture. Fascistization is a process that works like a language game. In it, catharsis does not indicate the "purification" of negative passions, but the emptying of subjectivity. Catharsis is perpetrated by the capitalism that dominates all spheres of life, including politics. The performance of the one who imitates the "clown", knowing or not that he does it, is now much closer to the "kitsch", considering the historical conditions of capitalism itself, fashion, style and the creation of plastic patterns. It is in this sense that Adorno will say in *Aesthetic Theory* that "kitsch parodies catharsis"<sup>41</sup>.

The inflection that allows us to perceive the updating and intensification of the ridicule when compared to other grotesque forms becomes evident at this point. If we remember that the Nazis aimed, in Wagner's line,<sup>42</sup> politics as

40 Adorno TW, Horkheimer M (1988) *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Fischer: Frankfurt am Main. P. 149

41 Adorno TW (2008) *Teoria Estética*. Edições 70: Lisboa. P. 268.

42 Ver Lajosi, Krisztina. 2010. « Wagner and the (Re)mediation of Art. Gesamtkunstwerk and Nineteenth-Century Theories of Media ». *Frame* 23 (2):4260. In <http://www.tijdschriftframe.nl/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/03.-Krisztina-Lajosi-Wagner-and-the-Re-mediation-of-Art-Gesamtkunstwerk-and-Nineteen-Century-Theories-of-Media-main.pdf>.

a “total work of art”, we are able to understand what happens with styles and in what sense the question of parody leads back to the theme of farce.

Laughter has been flattened. In the loss of its critical and disturbing character it has been transformed into simple and pure entertainment as is the case with linguistic forms under the sign of the Cultural Industry. The laughter that could be critical paved the way for shallow debauchery and cynicism. Whether the laughter of reconciliation or terror, the first to release from “physical dangers” and the second from the “claws of logic,” what one would expect with laughter would be a deeper release. Frankfurtian philosophers will say that the “liberation promised by fun is the liberation of thought as denial”. It is in this sense that entertainment will be, for the authors, the new catharsis<sup>43</sup>. The “cultural industry unveils the truth about catharsis”<sup>44</sup> because if “catharsis is a purgative action of emotions that harmonizes with repression” this means that it finds new paths of expression not always linked to something better.

The social trot implicit in laughter, as we see in Bergson, implies something of this catharsis and the aesthetic-political character of laughter. According to him,

“The pleasure of laughing is not a pure pleasure, I mean an exclusively aesthetic pleasure, absolutely disinterested. It is mixed with a second intention that society has towards us when we do not have ourselves. It mixes the unconfessed intention of humiliating; therefore, it is true, of correcting at least externally”<sup>45</sup>.

In this case, laughter implies an action on the other which is that of humiliation, of downgrading that guarantees a kind of sovereignty, that of subjective superiority in a brief game of language, like witticism. On an institutional level, it would imply the superiority of the evil ruler, who humiliates the people and is, by the people, idolized. In contexts of polarization, the people humiliate the people with the infamous leader as mediator of humiliation. The catharsis is in this case, linked to an operation by which the tragic has been lost from sight. Bergson realized the proximity of the field of laughter to life. In his words,

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See also: Dennis, David B. “The Most German of All German Operas”: Die Meistersinger through the Lens of the Third Reich. *Wagner’s Meistersinger: Performance, History, Representation*: 98-119, 2003. Harvey, David. 1992. *A condição pós-moderna*. São Paulo: Loyola.

43 Veloso CW (2018) *Pourquoi la “Poétique” d’Aristote ? «Diagogè»*.

44 Adorno TW, Horkheimer M (1988) *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. Fischer: Frankfurt am Main. P. 152

45 Bergson, Henri. Bergson, Henri. 1924. *Le Rire : essai sur la signification du comique*. Version numérique par Bertrand Gibier. Paris: Éditions. Digital version by Bertrand Gibier. See in [http://www.uqac.quebec.ca/zone30/Classiques\\_des\\_sciences\\_sociales/index.html](http://www.uqac.quebec.ca/zone30/Classiques_des_sciences_sociales/index.html)

“... comedy is a lot closer to real life than drama. The greater the drama, the deeper the elaboration to which the poet had to submit the reality in order to understand the tragicity in pure state. On the contrary, it is only in its lower forms, vaudeville and farce, that comedy contrasts with reality, for the higher it rises, the more it tends to be confused with life, and there are real life scenes so close to high comedy that the theatre could appropriate them without changing a word”.

Comedy imitates reality - while tragedy in Aristotle’s classic definition imitates myth<sup>46</sup> - on a different level. Sometimes, arriving at the eschatological, as in the concepts of low material and body in Bakhtin<sup>47</sup>. The authoritarian element of laughter is linked to a non-dialectic lowering of the values of the tragic. *What is worth in terms of the Latin saying “castigat ridendo mores” that is, laughing “punishing” customs, changes absolutely when it comes to the contemporary ridicule which has itself become a hegemonic pattern, giving to everything that “air of similarity” that Adorno and Horkheimer talked about in relation to the cultural industry. If, as Bakhtin said, “the buffoon is the king of the inverted world”, he has reproduced himself technologically and advertizingly until there are no more differences between the worlds.*

The image of political buffoonery that appears in profusion in the news, descends from a kind of misrepresentation of the comical aspects. Historically, carnival had the political function of equalizing the classes below, of relativizing truths, of putting the authorities in a proper human place, creating what in Bakhtin’s view was one of the most fundamental moments of humanism, that in which people could live an intense relationship between utopia and reality by the cancellation of inequalities. In Bakhtin’s view, downgrading is a topographic, bodily, material principle that does not have an abstract moral aspect.

If the logic of the carnival view of the world was that of things inside out, of a world “backwards” in which everything was reversed, we have a parameter from which we can think of contemporary political ridicule. It is not a question, in ridicule, of creating a second world, a second life, as in carnival, in which every staging seeks and leads to a kind of mess, it is a world to the downside in which the second life took the place of the first, in which the serious and the non-serious were confused, in the form of a juxtaposition of scenes that can produce highly destructive effects of

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46 Aristotle. *Poetics*. Project Gutenberg ebook. Translator S.H. Butcher. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1974/1974-h/1974-h.htm>

47 Bakhtin M (2010) *A Cultura Popular na Idade Média e no Renascimento: O contexto de François Rabelais*. Hucitec : São Paulo.

subjectivity and objectivity. In this sense, laughter is the trap, the bait that the Cultural Industry puts on the hordes of consumers devoured by consumerism.

### Politically Excited Society

The concept of laughter as catharsis helps us to understand the adherence of the masses to fascism. On the one hand, banality takes over all social and community processes and experiences. On the other, banality leads to ecstasy. Catharsis in the Cultural Industry has this narcotic role. It is the human perception that is affected under aesthetic conditions that, in our time, understand the microtechnological, digital and media as exposed in Christoph Türcke's work *Erregte Gesellschaft* in which the ecstatic character of the media takes over the world of life. These conditions define the production of language and its dissemination. The conditions of our time involve the Cultural Industry as a whole, but also the cultural industry of politics which leads us to reflect on the creation of political stereotypes that are successful, that cause sensation. They are political actors who, like stars, hypnotize the masses by putting everyone under the effect of their speeches and performances. Hypnosis and the production of ecstasy become political methodologies. It is not by chance that religion, economy and politics are getting closer and closer because they use similar methods.

The society of "sensation" that Türcke deals with is one in which the control of bodies is exercised at the level of the stimulus of perception through a strategy of shocks at various intensities<sup>48</sup>. The shocks act on the senses and on the whole sensitivity of individuals whose capacity to perceive cannot be neglected in a life defined by digital conditions. For Türcke sensation is a new paradigm<sup>49</sup> whose history needs to be understood. Türcke speaks of a culture in which microtechnological conditions determine experience. According to him, there is a weakening of what he calls "theological and political sense of what "necessarily hits us". The process is "physiotheological", that is, it touches not only rationality or sensitivity (categories that treat the human body in a dualistic way), but the "physiological sense of expression". In his words:

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48 Naomi Klein (2008) reconstructs the history of American research on electric shocks and the use of this mechanism in torture during the era of Latin American dictatorships and compares neoliberalism to a procedure based on a policy of shocks. See KLEIN, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine. The rise of disaster capitalism*. Picador, 2008.

49 "From a certain perspective, the paradigm of sensation is more "paradigmatic" than the one conceived by Kuhn: not only as the research base of a scientific system, but as the perception base of an entire society. It is not only scientific beliefs that are subject to historical change; the whole apparatus of perception, from which they emerge, is transformed - only much slower. (TÜRCKE, p.85)

"What strikes, touches and moves is that which, as an injection, agitates our nervous system and, even if only for a moment, draws attention. Sensation today, in colloquial language, simply means "that which causes sensation". When the word passed from Latin to the European national languages, it represented well in general the physiotheological primacy of feeling or perception - without any spectacular connotation. And what is most remarkable is that precisely the high news pressure of the present, which almost automatically associates "sensation" with "causing a sensation", not only overlaps with the old physiological sense of sensation, but also moves it in a new way. In other words, if everything that is not capable of causing a sensation tends to disappear under the flow of information, practically no longer being perceived, then this means, conversely, that the direction is in the direction that only what causes a sensation is perceived"<sup>50</sup>.

If in fact the perception of what produces sensation becomes the "sensation tout court," all bodies are submitted to it. Submission to sensation as a form of excitement is aesthetic and political. It alters the field of politics and aesthetics, as well as the aesthetic and political practices of the world of life. What causes "sensation" is farce. The quality of this sensation, in turn, will depend on factors linked to the cultural conditions of individuals and groups. Comedy will more easily reach the masses whose subjectivities have long been configured for the comic performances and catharsis of the cultural industry. The style is kitsch. It is in this sense that the deputies most voted in the elections of countries like Brazil are those who make people laugh, or who capture the voters making jokes. Jair Bolsonaro himself, before becoming a more serious fascist, was presented only as a funny guy. Many intellectuals did not believe in his potential until he won the elections. Maybe because there is something fictitious about fascism, as Adorno said. Propaganda as a war machine is the field responsible for the work of turning ridicule into something "sensational".

In view of the demotion of politics to advertising, we can understand why certain elected rulers in the wave of right-wing extremism do not seem to have the competence to govern, but continue in action as if they were still campaigning, in full exercise of verbal and visual rhetoric of propaganda as can be seen in the demonstrations of Trump and Bolsonaro on the social networks even after time occupying their posts. It is the logic of the typical commercial piece of the political campaign that has become method. In this vein, politics can

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50 Türcke C (2002) *Erregte Gesellschaft: Philosophie der Sensation*. München: Beck.

be defined as a commodity in the sense of what is presented as an “aesthetic event” in which the commercial is “the new form of communication and perception”. We are driven by a “high pressure” of information that is both economic, aesthetic and physiotheological.

The body is hit by shocks that function as injections that dominate existence physically through a circuit in which anaesthesia and addiction are manipulated. Wear on the nervous system will come later. Before the body will get used to the game between pleasure and displeasure and will remain alive and will be a docile body. Through the sensation this body is explored economically, physically and aesthetically. T urcke says: “the aestheticization of all relations of production and life is also an aestheticization of expropriation and exploitation”. It is in this sense that the “audiovisual shocks” applied to bodies as “stored” make “the cash register sound somewhere” and no one realizes they are being exploited because they are addicted to fashion, television series, social networks.

Abuse over the body is the very engine of the capitalist economy. We must not forget the relationship with the history of women’s exploitation, and the centrality of the body in this process, as an exploitation “economic, physical and aesthetic” at the same time and which is the basic model of exploitation and violence of capitalism in force until today.

From exploration of the sensory system, the nervous system itself, few have the chance to escape. One of its effects is the “compulsion to emit” that becomes universal behaviour. It has the structure of addiction that becomes both banal<sup>51</sup> and universal. The docility of the body is explicit in what T urcke defines as the “essentially conformist characteristic of addiction: the willingness of a colossal number of human beings to place themselves before the dropper of a multimedia apparatus and let themselves be explored neurologically and aesthetically. Such questioning helps us understand why presidents like Jair Bolsonaro or Donald Trump (and so many other characters of political ridicule style), and the whole of their government apply daily shocks to the population, with linguistic words and actions. Such shocks are promoted by social networks. Their content comes to dominate the daily news and mentality. Actions related to the annihilation of rights hide behind the daily headlines and scenes of political ridicule that constitute a new form of totalitarianism internalized by citizens and perhaps without a chance to be overcome socially, aesthetically and politically.

## Conclusion

The advance of political ridicule as capital takes advantage of its own naturalisation in late capitalism. The masses are every day more deprived of aesthetic and intellectual resources, due to the shock produced by the cultural industry. The masses fall into the visual and verbal rhetoric of ridicule, but even intellectuals fall into the traps of this phenomenon, often considering it to be just the usual political game. This is the power of the phenomenon. Everyone is captured by the ecstatic nature of the scene. Extreme right-wing populism quietly navigates this production and reproduction of ecstasy, which is due to its own mesmerizing nature and the hijacking of subjectivities.

The naturalization of ridicule is the greatest cunning of capital in excited society. Ridicule imposes itself as capital and as new mediation. It is no longer the simple image or scene, but the image capitalized by its excess, by its admeasurement, by its potential for inversion. Neither is it just an image seen as fiction or entertainment, much more a religious-economic and political ecstasy.

Political ridicule is a social relation mediated by scenes. These scenes are the spectacular, exhibitionist and ostentatious capital itself. The subjectivity involved in this process is that of the perverse, of the subject without the dimension of the other and who, with him, is living together. The subject of political ridicule is, at the same time, an object in a vast process of objectification of the other. The other is not an equal, but only an enemy and, as such, must be treated as a thing, and relegated to an idiot in a cynical game. Political ridicule takes advantage of the stupidification of society to better humiliate each body/subject. The person to be humiliated should become incapable of perceiving the humiliation. Someone will become unable to see as an object within a power game because the conditions that would allow them to know it was a game were taken away from them before they could even choose to participate.

As a political technology, ridicule is the facade of fascism. Behind it hides horror.

51 I developed in a previous work the notion of “banality of addiction”. TIBURI, Marcia; Dias, Andr ea. *Sociedade fissurada*. (Fissured Society: to think about drugs and the banality of addiction). Rio de Janeiro: Civiliza o Brasileira: 2012.

